

Readings for Thursday the 13th Week of the Year

Reading 1 Amos 7:10-17

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent word to Jeroboam, king of Israel:

“Amos has conspired against you here within Israel; the country cannot endure all his words.

For this is what Amos says:

Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be exiled from its land.”

To Amos, Amaziah said:

“Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah!

There earn your bread by prophesying, but never again prophesy in Bethel; for it is the king’s sanctuary and a royal temple.”

Amos answered Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor have I belonged to a company of prophets; I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores.

The LORD took me from following the flock, and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

Now hear the word of the LORD!”

You say: prophesy not against Israel, preach not against the house of Isaac.

Now thus says the LORD:

Your wife shall be made a harlot in the city, and your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword;

Your land shall be divided by measuring line, and you yourself shall die in an unclean land;

Israel shall be exiled far from its land.

Responsorial Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

R. (10cd) **The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.**

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul;

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.

R. **The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.**

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;

The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye.

R. **The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.**

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever;

The ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.

They are more precious than gold,
than a heap of purest gold;
Sweeter also than syrup
or honey from the comb.

R. The judgments of the Lord are true, and all of them are just.

Gospel Matthew 9:1-8

After entering a boat, Jesus made the crossing, and came into his own town.
And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher.
When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,
“Courage, child, your sins are forgiven.”
At that, some of the scribes said to themselves,
“This man is blaspheming.”
Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said,
“Why do you harbor evil thoughts?
Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’
or to say, ‘Rise and walk’?
But that you may know that the Son of Man
has authority on earth to forgive sins”—
he then said to the paralytic,
“Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.”
He rose and went home.
When the crowds saw this they were struck with awe
and glorified God who had given such authority to men.

Reflection for Thursday the 13th Week of the Year

Amos means burden in Hebrew. As a prophet, his message was rooted deeply in social justice. He was a southerner from the kingdom of Judah. He journeyed north, to Israel to deliver his message. The message Amos delivered, as we hear in this first reading, was unsavory. He prophesied doom, destruction and enslavement. The people of Israel were more interested in their own affluence and comfort than caring for the poor. This was to be the reason for the coming catastrophe. Despite Amos’ powerful preaching, no one listened. The King, priesthood and people remained unmoved and lived unchanged. From this passage we hear there was powerful, systemic resistance to God’s word. Amos’ prophecy came to pass. Israel was defeated by the Assyrians and the people taken into captivity.

Whenever these passages occur in the yearly cycle, I must always give pause. Were the fall of the nation and the bondage of the people God’s just punishment for the people’s refusal to accept God’s word and repent? I have the tendency to think of troubles as being punishment

for sin. It can seem that God's message is, "Repent or else!" We call scripture the Word of God. Did God really threaten the people of Israel with evil? On one hand, it can seem to be so. Terrible things happen. We are in the midst of a deadly pandemic. Has God punished us for our sins? It can sure feel that way. However, God is a God of life, love and mercy. On the other hand, the people brought their faith in God into a pagan world that didn't know God. God's message actually is, "Repent and live." The people of Israel did that as they lived in foreign lands. It was because of the Diaspora that Judaism became a world-wide religion and paved the way for Christianity.

To know what God intends for us and what God wants from us is not always clear. God doesn't actually give us directions as we live. The Holy Spirit does not act like a GPS device. We have, instead, more of a roadmap. We have options, choices we can make. We all still have free will. We will make mistakes and wander a bit. We all believe in God. We accept Jesus as our savior. We seek out the guidance of the Spirit. We come from God. God is part of our living. We live our lives by God's grace. We return to God when we die. We know this by faith.

There is a notion that is worthwhile to mention. One can be healed even if there is no cure. Only a small remnant returned to Israel and Judah. The rest lives on, spread throughout the world. Healing and curing are two completely different experiences. Curing means to eliminate all evidence of disease. Healing means to become whole. COVID 19 still rages as we do our best to cope and keep each other safe.

Today's Psalm mentions, "Fear of the Lord." Growing up, it was the last of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. When I was in college, in the 1970s, it was changed to, "Awe and Wonder (of the Lord)." I have always thought that to be an important change. Instead of fearing the hand of God we can have wonder and awe amid God's creation. Is it possible to see God's hand in another way? Over the last months, I have had more time on my hands. I have wondered of many things. I am in awe of how the coronavirus spreads. It can spread before those infected have symptoms. People can pass the disease to some one else before they know they have it. For the virus, this is a wonderful strategy for the virus to survive and propagate.

As I read the gospel, a simple detail caught my attention. The first line mentions Jesus arrival at his "own town" by boat. What town is that, Nazareth, right? Wrong; Jesus grew up in Nazareth. Nazareth, Jesus' home town, is land locked too. Jesus lived, as an adult, in the fishing town of Capernaum. It is on the shore of the fresh water lake we call the Sea of Galilee. This adds some context to Jesus' life. He lived near the apostles, some of whom were fishermen.

Jesus, in this story, both cured and healed this man. Jesus removed the man's paralysis thereby curing him. He forgave the man's sins thereby healing him. The elders object not to the curing aspect of the story but the healing and forgiving aspect of it. Only God can forgive sin. We already believe Jesus to be God's son. We know Jesus can forgive sin. We expect Jesus to forgive the man's sins for we approach Jesus to forgive our sins. Jesus' main mission was to forgive sin by dying on the cross. The curing was the sign that Jesus had the power to forgive

the man. The emphasis of the story shows the curing and healing to be the same act. Jesus responded to their faith as he responds to ours.

We know the need for a cure for COVID 19. Few of us have the capacity to discover a treatment or vaccine. We pray for those people who do and that the Spirit guides their work. We also know the need for the world to become whole. Coming together may not be healthy. Healing may be in choosing social distancing. The best we can do is to slow the spread of this virus. The human heart is another thing. There is pain in separation, loss and fear. Each of us needs to be whole. What can we do? We can choose to call, text, Skype or Zoom one another. Keeping in touch is always possible in other ways. Keeping close to others is different than being physically close.

There are other things that keep us apart. We all have opinions that we treat as truths sometimes. Never talk politics or religion at family gathering. Politics I can sidestep. Religion I can't always. I am the family priest. How do we see the presence of God in people we don't like? God is present in each of us. God created everyone in God's image and likeness. There is only one human race. Being mindful of God's presence in each human being may be a good way to become whole. We all need to hear Jesus' words, "Take comfort, my child, your sins are forgiven." Jesus has won forgiveness for us once and for all through his death on the cross.

May health continue to be yours. If not, may you know Jesus' healing.

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